

Washington, D.C. – Congressman Wally Herger (CA-02) participated in a House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands field hearing today in Sacramento, California entitled, “Restoring Public Access to the Public’s Lands: Issues Impacting Multiple-use on Our National Forests.” The hearing was held to identify specific issues and potential administrative or legislative remedies to address multiple-use barriers on Forest Service land. Witnesses included the Forest Service, state officials and impacted citizens who spoke of the land-use regulations, policies and actions that are preventing activities and limiting access on Forest Service land.

Rep. Wally Herger said, “Today’s hearing highlighted the fact that poor federal land management practices have significantly harmed rural communities. These are the people’s lands and I believe that we can protect our federal lands while ensuring Americans have multiple-use access to them, which would help restore recreation, timber and many other essential rural industries. Unfortunately, burdensome, unnecessary regulations combined with frivolous lawsuits by fringe groups have helped to create a cycle of high unemployment, underfunded schools, and forests that are consistently threatened by catastrophic wildfires. At a time of great economic hardship it is essential that we restore public access to our federal lands and allow local communities, not bureaucracy, to decide what is best to get themselves back on their feet. If we put local communities back in charge of their own destinies, I believe that we will see renewed job creation and greater stability for the rural economies that truly need it.”

Chairman Rob Bishop (UT-01) said, “Given the federal government’s ownership of over 600 million acres of the land containing these resources and incredible natural sights, much of this debate is centered on how to best balance the many competing and worthy uses of public lands and resources.” National forests are an important and necessary source of economic activity and recreation for local communities and the public. This resource needs to be managed for the benefit of all users and I strongly believe that there is plenty of it to go around. ... During a time when certain activists are all too eager to exercise the full force of the law to attack multiple-use, we need our federal land managers working with us to keep the public’s lands open for the use and enjoyment of all.”

Rep. Tom McClintock (CA-04) commented, “The preservation of our forests for future generations does not mean closing them to the current generation. I believe that the vast timber, land and recreational assets administered by the U. S. Forest Service represent a limitless and renewable source of prosperity for our nation and for our local economies, a portion of which can then be redirected to assure the maintenance and preservation of the national forest lands for the use, enjoyment and prosperity of the American people in perpetuity. But, that will require a significant change in policy within the current Administration.”

The U.S. Forest Service manages 193 million acres of land comprising 155 National Forests, totaling eight percent of the United States' total land mass. In California, eighteen national forests cover nearly twenty percent of the State. Decades of increased regulation, environmental litigation and reduced forest management have diminished multiple-use access of these public lands. On Forest Service land, timber harvests have declined nearly eighty percent over the last thirty years and productivity has nearly come to a standstill. Overcrowding and mismanagement of the forests contributes to wildfires, disease and insect infestation. Growing volume and unhealthy forest conditions have led to wildfire suppression costs consuming nearly half of the Forest Service's annual budget.

Forest Service land is a vital source of economic activity in states and counties with large amounts of public land. Randy Moore, a Regional Forester for the U.S. Forest Service, acknowledged the economic benefits of Forest Service land. According to a 2010 study by National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM), the recreation visitation in California National Forests in California helps sustain 38,000 jobs.

Mike Wood, the Business Agent for United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America, spoke on behalf of saw mill workers and highlighted the benefits of proper forest management through timbering: "The timber industry will improve forest health by thinning, which improves the trees ability to withstand insects and drought. A thinned forest allows the snow pack to get to the ground instead of melting and vaporizing from the limbs of the trees, providing water later in the season for downstream users. Less trees also means less transpiration, which will provide more water to metropolitan and agricultural areas. A robust timber industry will diminish the frequency and intensity of wild fires, which will improve air and water quality." Mr. Wood also stressed the jobs that are supported by a robust timber industry, "Statistics from the Department of Agriculture show that for every \$1 million invested in forestry products, 39.7 jobs were created, which is the highest ratio of any industry."

Sheriff Greg Hagwood of Plumas County, California addressed the lack of transparency and public participation in the development of Forest Service Management plans. "While the Forest Service has satisfied, minimally, their legal requirements in terms of public comment and input, the reality within the effected population is that any suggestion, request or recommendation fell upon deaf ears within the Forest Service who already decided the course action prior to engaging in the requisite process." In order to reach a comprehensive management plan that satisfies all parties involved, it is imperative all stakeholders work collaboratively and have a voice in the planning process.

Access to our national forests is fundamental to achieve multiple-use of these public lands. Sam Davidson, California Field Director for Trout Unlimited, discussed the need for proper maintenance of roads and trails so that motor vehicles, hikers, bikers and sportsmen have unfettered access for their preferred recreation.